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‘Righteousness’ in the Gospels

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'RIGHTEOUSNESS' IN THE GOSPELS

COMMUNICATED BY THE REV. EDWIN A. ABBOTT, D.D.,
FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY,

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'THERE are two kinds of Christian righteousness,' says Hooker, 'the one without us, which we have by imputation; the other in us, which consisteth of faith, hope, charity, and other Christian virtues.'¹ This twofold technical definition of a righteousness that is called specially 'Christian' prepares us for something artificial in the use of the word in English. Shakespeare never uses it; nor do Pope and Shelley. When it is used by Milton, Cowper, and Wordsworth it is tinged with ecclesiastical or theological associations, which remain to this day, so that even now, when we enumerate the good qualities of some friend, we cannot—without some sense of unreality—speak of his 'righteousness'. We may praise his 'justice', but that is a narrower thing. We may praise his 'goodness', but that is a vaguer thing. We may praise his 'kind-heartedness', but that is a different thing. We have no English noun corresponding to that noble use of the Greek adjective which we find in Plato: 'God is as righteous as is possible [for divine nature], and there is nothing more like God than a human being that is as righteous as is possible [for human nature].'² With this preface, let us pass to the use, and non-use, of the word 'righteousness' in our Gospels, and to a consideration of the best explanation of the facts.

In Mark 'righteousness' is non-occurrent. In Matthew it occurs frequently, and always in Christ's words. In Luke it nowhere occurs in Christ's words, not even in parallels to Matthew—and only once elsewhere, namely, in the Song of Zacharias ('that we . . . should serve him [i.e. the Lord] without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him').³ In John it occurs in only one passage, where Jesus, in His last Discourse, says that the Paraclete will convict the world in respect of 'righteousness'.⁴ Assuming for the present that Matthew has preserved a genuine doctrine of Jesus about 'righteousness', we

¹ *Sermons*, ii. 21.

² Plato, *Theaet.* 176 C.

³ Luke i. 75.

⁴ John xvi. 8-10.

have to ask, first, what is its purport, and, secondly, why Luke has omitted it.

Starting from the LXX, we find that there the Greek *dikaiosuné*—that is, righteousness or justice—represents a great number of Hebrew words, but more especially a longer form of *tsdk* that is used for the first time thus: ‘Abraham believed God and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.’¹ The same Hebrew is repeated twice in Deuteronomy, ‘It shall be righteousness unto us if we observe to do all this commandment before the Lord our God’, and, more particularly, ‘Thou shalt surely restore to him [i.e. the needy borrower] the pledge when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his garment and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the Lord thy God.’² In all these passages the ‘righteousness’ is regarded as ‘reckoned’ unto some one (‘him’, ‘us’, ‘thee’) even where ‘reckoned’ is omitted. It is also ‘before God’, that is to say, as seen by the eyes of God, who sees the truth.

But here we are confronted with the fact that in the Deuteronomic passages the LXX has *eleemosuné*, which in the Gospels and Acts regularly means ‘charity’ in the sense of ‘charitable alms’. And the Hebrew (the above-mentioned form of *tsdk*) is sometimes translated thus in the Psalms, Isaiah, and Daniel. It also has this meaning in Mishnic Hebrew.³ This explains the error of A.V. in the Sermon on the Mount, ‘Take heed that ye do not your alms before men’. The correct reading is ‘Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men’—‘righteousness’ being technically used in the Mishnic sense of ‘alms’. And the context goes on to precepts about ‘almsgiving’. A.V. has followed a corrupt text which has substituted an easy word for a difficult one.

We shall come again to this passage in its order. Meantime we note not only the fact that Luke omits it, but also the possibility that he may have omitted it for the same reason that induced some scribes to corrupt Matthew’s version of it. Writing for Greeks and Gentiles, Luke wrote for readers who deemed righteousness one of the most divine virtues. Greeks would not understand that Jews had special need to beware of a spurious ‘righteousness’. The true righteousness was to be ‘before God’. The false righteousness was ‘before men’, or ‘righteousness according to [Levitical] Law’, that is, external righteousness of action extending to minute tithe-payings, and purifications, but not internal, not righteousness of heart or motive. Mark indirectly suggests this later on in his Gospel in a diffuse section on

¹ Gen. xv. 6 (LXX).

² Deut. vi. 25, xxiv. 13.

³ Levy, iv. 173 a.

'washings'; but even there he does not mention the term 'righteousness', preferring to say that 'the Law' has been overlaid by 'traditions'. There, Mark is followed by Matthew, who however omits some of Mark's diffuse details.¹ Luke omits the whole section—doubtless because it was technically Jewish, and also because it was needless for his Gentile readers, not because it was non-historical or needless for Christ's Jewish hearers at the time. Although Gentiles as well as Jews were in danger of self-righteousness, that danger was peculiarly great for the latter. For they possessed a law of righteousness written in a book, much of which dealt with externalities and was capable of being literally obeyed without moral effort. The danger is summed up in the Pauline saying that '*Israel pursued after a law of righteousness . . . being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and desiring to establish their own righteousness.*'²

We proceed to take Matthew's instances in order, merely premising that, even where they occur in Matthew's single tradition, they are not to be rejected at once as unauthoritative, since all the other Evangelists show a disposition to avoid using a word that Jesus Himself must incontestably have used, and since the avoidance of it can be reasonably explained in all the other Gospels as a natural and not dishonest 'suppressio obscuri'.

The first instance is connected with Christ's coming to the Baptist to be baptized by him. The prophet expostulates, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by thee'. But Jesus replies, 'Suffer [it] now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil *all righteousness*'.³ What is meant by 'it becometh' as distinct from 'it is needful'? And does 'us' (instead of 'me') mean the Baptist and Jesus, or 'all Israel of whom I am one'? And how can the reception of baptism, which is not prescribed either by the Law of Moses or by the Law of Nature, come under the head of a 'fulfilling' of 'all righteousness'?

Early explanations are few and divergent. Ignatius writes that Jesus Christ 'was baptized by John in order that *all righteousness* might be fulfilled by Him'—asserting in the same sentence that He was '*truly* from the race of David . . . Son of God . . . *truly* born of a virgin . . . *truly* nailed [to the cross]'⁴—as if protesting (against the Docetics) that there was '*truly*' some objective 'righteousness' that was to be 'fulfilled' by the baptism. But he does not tell us what it was. Origen says 'Christ Himself is related to have been baptized by John, not with that baptism which is in Christ (Rom. vi. 3), but with that which is in the Law. For so He Himself says to

¹ Mark vii. 1 foll., Matt. xv. 1 foll.

² Rom. ix. 31-x. 3.

³ Matt. iii. 15.

⁴ Ign. *Smyrn.* § 1.

John, "Suffer it now . . . all righteousness". Whereby He shows that the baptism of John was a fulfilment of the ancient things (*expletio veterum*), not a beginning of the new things (*inchoatio novorum*).¹ On the other hand, Jerome says that Jesus refrained from adding the nature of the righteousness—whether it was the righteousness of the Law or the righteousness of Nature—for the express purpose of making us understand that it meant both. But he, too, does not explain how the acceptance of baptism 'fulfilled' either kind of righteousness.² Chrysostom says, 'How is it "becoming"? Because we are thereby fulfilling the whole Law. . . . For "righteousness" is the complete fulfilment of the commandments [of the Law].'³

But what 'commandment' of the 'old things'—that is, the Old Dispensation or Law—prescribed baptism? None is alleged by these ancient writers. The *Horae Hebraicae* indeed paraphrases 'all righteousness' as 'everything that is just', and says that as the Levitical priests 'were initiated by washing and anointing, so was He by baptism and the Holy Ghost'.⁴ But this narrows down 'all righteousness' into such righteousness as was required by the Law from 'Levitical priests'—hardly a satisfactory explanation.

Perhaps the words may be explained by something like Origen's interpretation, as meaning that the Baptist, the last of the prophets, was making a final prophetic attempt to put new life into the fulfilment of the righteousness of the old Law, and that Jesus, while awaiting further revelation, said that it was 'becoming' or 'seemly' for all Israel to join in this attempt 'for the present' (R.V. 'now'), although He anticipated that it would be insufficient. This view is not incompatible with the belief that even before His baptism Jesus felt intimations of a future that would make the old righteousness pass into the background. None the less, it might seem His present business, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, to 'take hold of the seed of Abraham', so that 'it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren'.⁵ Christ's 'brethren' were resorting to John's baptism; He, then, would do the same.

The next instance is in the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, where the parallel texts of Matthew and Luke seem to exhibit either Matthew's predilection for the word we are discussing or Luke's avoidance of it.

¹ Origen on Rom. vi. 3–4 (Lomm. vi. 383).

² Jerome on Matt. iii. 15.

³ Chrys. on Matt. iii. 15 (ed. Field i. 154).

⁴ Hor. Heb. on Matt. iii. 15.

⁵ Heb. ii. 16–17. The Baptist himself indicates that this 'taking hold of the seed of Abraham' might be ineffectual, and that other 'children of Abraham' might be (Matt. iii. 9, Luke iii. 8) 'raised up' from 'the stones'.

Matt. v. 10.

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after *righteousness*.

Blessed are they that have been persecuted for the sake of *righteousness*.

Luke vi. 21.

Blessed are ye that hunger *now*.

Luke omits.

Here we must remind ourselves that Christ's precepts to His first converts and missionary disciples would probably be current in at least two different forms:—first, a single brief summary, of the nature of a Missionary's Manual; secondly, detailed and separate accounts, arranged chronologically or according to subject-matter, of the several sayings, along with the circumstances or causes that had originated some of them. These would be rather of the nature of a Biography. Sayings from the Manual might sometimes be combined with sayings from the Biography. We can quote from Matthew's version of the Precepts to the Twelve an instance of combination in Matthew parallel to an instance of separation in Luke. Some sayings that Matthew inserts in the Precepts to the Twelve Luke omits there, but inserts in his account of a Mission of Seventy peculiar to his Gospel.¹

This being the case, we must not assume that we have no alternative here between supposing that Luke altered Matthew or Matthew altered Luke. We ought more cautiously to say, 'It is quite possible that there were at least two originals, (1) a Manual, (2) a Biographical Collection of Logia'. Luke may have argued that the Logion here was liable to be misunderstood. It might encourage some to be content with aspirations after a self-regarding righteousness instead of practical well-doing beneficent to others. The Manual was liable to no such objection. It was addressed to the *disciples alone*, the champions and preachers of the Gospel, meaning 'Blessed are *ye, my disciples*, though ye hunger in this world, and though ye are cast out by men for my sake.' On the other hand, in preferring the Logion, Matthew may have been actuated by a desire to extend the application of the words beyond the circle of Missionaries by changing the second into the third person, and by avoiding the danger of the Lucan 'now'. For 'now', if taken literally, might mean that every one, however bad, if poor and persecuted in this world, would be blessed in the next. He would not hunger *then*, if he 'hungered now'.

Continuing our questioning in the same spirit, we must not ask 'Why does Luke omit "thirst"?' but 'Why does the Version adopted by Luke—perhaps the Manual—omit "thirst"?' And the answer will be, 'Partly for brevity, and partly because Luke and the author

¹ Matt. x. 12–15, Luke x. 5–6, 11–12.

of the Manual took the words literally and comforted the Missionaries under literal 'hunger'. On the other side, if we ask why the Version adopted by Matthew inserts 'thirst', the answer will be that Matthew and the Logia are not so brief and did not take the words literally.

Philo speaks of 'those who thirst and hunger for the gracious gift of goodness' as typified by the children of Israel receiving the manna in the wilderness;¹ and the Psalm of Wandering describes the Israelites in the wilderness as 'hungry and thirsty'.² Matthew quotes, in the context of the passage that we are discussing, the Psalm that says, 'The meek shall inherit the land'.³ This, too, Luke omits. It is certainly difficult and certainly not true to literal and ordinary experience. But it was true in the mind of the Hebrew Psalmist. And a similar metaphorical inheritance or reception of 'lands' is promised elsewhere by Jesus in Mark and Matthew where the parallel Luke omits 'lands'.⁴

In that passage a reason can be given for Luke's omission, though 'lands' was in the original. The context deals with the renunciation of home and home relations by a disciple and his recompense for renouncing them. Now it was intelligible that a disciple, renouncing home relations in order to enter into the Church, should receive among his new Christian brethren, even in this world, the equivalent, and more than the equivalent, of his former 'brethren and sisters and mother and children'. But it was not so easily intelligible that he should receive 'lands'. Philo, it is true, represents Abraham—when called forth by God from his home in Haran to wander like a pilgrim—as saying to God, 'Thou, Lord, art my country and my kinsfolk and my father's hearth'.⁵ But this is not the same thing as saying to God, 'Thou art my lands.' Luke, therefore, might omit 'lands' as being possibly an error, and certainly unintelligible to his readers.

Yet Philo's language, mentioning 'Abraham', and 'country', and 'father's hearth', may guide us to an understanding of the Marcan 'lands' as being an allusion to the renunciation of Abraham, when the Lord said to him, 'Get thee out from *thy country*, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto *the land that I will show thee*',⁶ and afterwards, 'I am the Lord that brought thee out . . . to give thee *this land* to inherit it'.⁷ Abraham might be said antithetically to be giving up 'lands' inherited from his father Terah, in order to inherit a '*land*' promised to him by the Father in heaven. This is the first mention of 'inheriting' in the Bible. It should be

¹ Philo, i. 566.

² Ps. cvii. 5, comp. ib. 9, 36.

³ Ps. xxxvii. 11.

⁴ Mark x. 29-30; Matt. xix. 29, Luke xviii. 29-30.

⁵ Philo, i. 477.

⁶ Gen. xii. 1.

⁷ Gen. xv. 7.

studied along with the Christian comment, that Abraham 'obeyed to go out unto *a place that he was to receive for an inheritance*' and 'became a sojourner in the land of promise'.¹ Then the prominence given by the earlier Gospels to 'lands' becomes explicable. And in favour of the insertion of 'lands' there is this argument, that no Evangelist would make such a paradoxical addition to Christ's list of home relations without authority. Although, therefore, we may find no fault with Luke, or may even praise him for his tact and sense of what was suitable to his Gentile readers, we must not praise him, in his version of the doctrine of Renunciation, for a strict and literal accuracy in reporting Christ's words.

Returning to the Sermon on the Mount, we are justified in believing that Matthew is not amplifying, or summarizing out of his own head, but is adding a longer and more poetic version taken from the Logia. Luke, on the other hand, if he is not here himself abridging and summarizing, is taking his version from the Manual. This may well have seemed to him more practical and comforting to Missionaries, more true to experience and history, and more intelligible to Gentiles.²

The next two instances use 'righteousness' in a technical sense for 'almsgiving'. 'Your righteousness', says Jesus to His disciples, must exceed 'the righteousness of the Pharisees', and 'Take heed that ye do not your righteousness (A.V. alms) before men to be seen by them'.³ Why does Luke nowhere insert these surely very needful warnings? Perhaps because of their technicality. At all events he inserts a non-technical parable directed against those who 'trusted in themselves that they were *righteous* and despised others'. They are typified by a Pharisee praying by the side of a Publican. The Pharisee says, 'God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men . . . or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I get.' The Publican says, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner'. Luke adds, as the comment of Jesus, 'I say unto you, This man went down to his house *made righteous*'—that is, *beheld as righteous by God*—'rather than the other'.⁴ Here all technicality is removed by

¹ Heb. xi. 8-9.

² A minor point is worth noting. In Heb. 'to thirst' is followed by Heb. prep. 'for' (Gk. dat.), but in idiomatic Gk. by genitive. Τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ dat. may have been confused with τῷ δικαιοσύνῃ accus., which Matthew has. Luke, if he had the dat. before him, may have thought that it meant 'in the way of righteousness', or 'in the cause of righteousness', that is, 'now, while doing the work of a missionary'. Comp. Ps. lxiii. 1 'thirsteth for thee', LXX σοι, but B² Ν² σε.

³ Matt. v. 20, vi. 1.

⁴ Luke xviii. 9-14.

the introductory phrase, 'trusted in themselves that they were righteous'.

In the next instance—the final one in the Sermon on the Mount—Matthew employs a phrase used also by Paul speaking about the righteousness of God.¹ This fact may be urged by some in favour of the view that Luke omits it, not because it was technical, but because it was part of a paraphrastic amplification of a brief original retained by Luke in its brevity.

Matt. vi. 33.

But seek ye first his kingdom
and *his righteousness*—or, the
kingdom and *his righteousness*²—
and all these things shall be added
unto you.

Luke xii. 31.

Only seek ye his kingdom, and
these things shall be added unto
you.

On the other hand, Luke might very well omit a Pauline phrase if it had become associated with technical controversy. And the reading in Matthew, 'Seek ye first *his kingdom* (or, *the kingdom*)' resembles an early Mishnic saying in Berachoth, that one is to '*receive upon him the yoke of the kingdom of heaven first*', and, after that, receive upon him the yoke of the commandments.³ Also, Matthew's version accords with his version of the Lord's prayer, where, after 'Thy kingdom come', he (but not Luke) inserts 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'—so that the prayer for the fulfilment of God's righteous will, i.e. His 'righteousness' (as well as for His 'kingdom') comes 'first', before the prayer for daily bread. It accords also with the above-quoted Matthaean beatitude, 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness'. There is a consistency and originality in these Matthaean sayings which suggests that they are not Matthew's patchings of the Manual, but Matthew's borrowings from the Logia.

Matthew's final instance of the word, like his first, is connected with John the Baptist. It is in a charge brought against the chief priests and the elders of the people, to whom Jesus says, 'John came unto you *in the way of righteousness*, and ye believed him not, but

¹ Paul, however, uses it for the most part controversially, and makes distinctions between (Rom. i. 17, iii. 5, 21) 'righteousness of God' and other unsatisfying kinds of righteousness (Rom. x. 3, 5, &c., Phil. iii. 6, &c.). That the phrase (Gen. xv. 6) 'counted for righteousness' had become a subject for Christian controversy in the first century is indicated by the Epistle of James, ii. 21–4.

² Codex B has τὴν ἐκποστήνην καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ, which might mean 'righteousness and his kingdom' or 'his righteousness and kingdom'; SS. and other authorities have 'the kingdom of God and his righteousness'; Burkitt quotes from Aphraates, 'Let us seek his kingdom and his righteousness.'

³ *Aboth*, ed. Taylor, p. 117, quoting *Berach.* ii. 2.

the publicans and the harlots believed him ; and ye (emph.) [yourselves] when ye saw it, did not even afterwards repent that ye might believe him'.¹ It is not surprising if Luke found 'in the way of righteousness' difficult. For the margin refers us to no parallel in the Old Testament except a highly poetic and exultant utterance of the divine Wisdom, 'I walk *in the way of righteousness*'.² But in Matthew the reference appears to be (as an ancient commentary indicates) to a much narrower 'righteousness'.³ Jesus seems to say, 'John came to you, the observers of the Law, *in the way of an enlarged righteousness of the Law*, enjoining fasting, and enlarging the duty of almsgiving,⁴ and yet ye believed him not.'

This would seem to mean a 'righteousness of works' liable to become mechanical, but not, in itself, inconsistent with that righteousness which is mentioned, for the first time in the Bible, in connexion with Abraham, whose belief in the promise of God 'was counted to him for righteousness'. We have seen that, at the outset of his Gospel, Matthew represented Jesus the Messiah as agreeing with John the Baptist, the Prophet, in the desire to do the utmost possible for the old Law of righteousness of man's works⁵ before He Himself, as the Messiah, introduced the Gospel of the Promise of the Spirit of God. Having begun thus, Matthew proceeds to represent Jesus, in the

¹ Matt. xxi. 32. The parallel Luke vii. 29 has 'And all the people when they heard, and the publicans, accounted God (or, recognized God as) righteous, having been baptized with the baptism of John'. This seems to mean 'recognized the righteousness of God in the righteous warning of John His messenger'. Luke's context has a reference to the Baptist's fasting (Luke vii. 33, Matt. xi. 18), 'eating no bread nor drinking wine'. This (comp. Luke xviii. 12, 'I fast twice in the week') might have been supposed likely to attract some Pharisees to John at the beginning of his mission.

² Prov. viii. 20.

³ Cramer on Matt. xxi. 28, 'he came to *you*, not to *them*', i.e. to *you* the observers of the Law. Chrysostom says: 'This—namely, believing John—was especially a hearkening to the Law of God. It was not therefore a matter of grace alone, but also of righteousness, that the harlots entered [the kingdom]. For they did not remain harlots when they entered.'

⁴ Comp. Luke iii. 11.

⁵ It is true that the fasting and the almsgiving enjoined by the Baptist were not enjoined by the Law (any more than baptism) except so far as the former might be regarded as an extension of the fast on the Day of Atonement and the latter as an extension of the provision for the widow and the orphan. But the Baptist hoped, perhaps, to put life into the Law by extending its visible province: 'The Law nowhere mentions "fasting" but only "afflicting one's soul". I cannot make these people afflict their souls by making them hate their own sins and love God's righteousness. But I can make them afflict their souls through their bodies by the pain of hunger, and this may prepare the way for something better, leading them to a sense, and to an avoidance, and finally to an abhorrence, of the sins that have brought on them the imposition of this pain.'

Sermon on the Mount, as defining this ‘righteousness’ in detail and as showing that the works must proceed from our love of God and our love of His righteousness, not from our love of man’s applause.

Now, in this final mention of ‘righteousness’, Matthew represents Jesus, toward the close of His career on earth, as standing in the Temple, the home of the sacrificial precepts of the Levitical Law. Looking back on what John attempted to do, He says, in effect, ‘John came to you Pharisees first, to you, the professed supporters of the Law in its minutest details. He came to you in the way of righteousness, that is to say, in the way of the righteousness of that Law, as distinguished from the way of Promise, and ye believed him not.’ Thus the rulers of the Jews are rebuked for not having seconded the Prophet’s efforts in behalf of that very Law to which they themselves professed devoted allegiance—the ancient and righteous Law of Israel.

All this is consistent and life-like. It gives us an insight into possibilities of various shades of feeling in the supporters of the Law and the would-be reformers of it. Some, including the Sadducees, might be content to observe the letter of the Pentateuch and nothing more. Others, reformers of a sort, including the Pharisees, might enclose the Law as it were with marginal hedges of interpretation, so as always to observe too much rather than too little—more especially enlarging ordinances concerning tithing and purifying and other external acts, so as to make them more strict, and their own righteousness in observing them more exact. Others, reformers of a better sort, might insist, as almost all the Prophets did, on the fundamental importance of purifying their conceptions of God, if they aspired to obey the Law of God, quoting, as from Hosea, the version adopted by the LXX, ‘I will have mercy *rather than sacrifice*’. Others, still more advanced reformers, going to an extreme length, as some of the Essenes are said to have done, might abstain from the sacrifices of animals altogether, quoting Hosea as in the Hebrew, and as Jesus Himself is alleged by Matthew to have quoted it, ‘I will have mercy and not sacrifice’.¹ Such different shades of Palestinian thought and controversial discussion Mark might not try to represent, because they belonged to a record of logia or discourses rather than to one of facts. Luke might avoid them because his readers were saturated with the Greek conception of true *dikaiosuné* as a virtue, divine as well as human, of the noblest kind. And to them the Gospel of their Saviour would seem no fit receptacle for protests-needed in old days but not

¹ Matt. ix. 13, Hos. vi. 6. Jerome makes no remark on the difference of the LXX from the Hebrew.

now—against the degradation of the term by past Jewish controversialists.

Turning to the Fourth Evangelist we find that in his Gospel he differs from Matthew as to the treatment of the term 'righteousness', and almost agrees with Luke. Almost, but not quite. There is one passage in which he represents Jesus as mentioning the word, on the night before His departure from the disciples in this world, and in order to prepare them for that departure. Jesus has previously promised them a Paraclete to take His place, being (as it were) His Second Self, the Spirit of Truth.¹ And now he says, 'And he [the Paraclete] when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of *righteousness*, and of judgement . . . of *righteousness* because I go to the Father and ye behold me no more'.² There is evidently here no thought at all of the Jewish 'righteousness of the Law', even in its broadest sense, much less in the sense of 'almsgiving'. It is a personification. The Father looks down from heaven to men on earth and sends His Paraclete to ask them, 'Where is my Righteousness, whom I sent down to live among you, and to make you righteous?' And men, convicted and ashamed, are regarded as compelled to reply, 'We did not love, we rejected, we cast out Thy Righteousness, because we ourselves were unrighteous'. Thus will the Paraclete 'convict the world', or constrain the world to convict itself, 'in respect of righteousness'.

The picture bears some resemblance to that of Astraea, the goddess of Justice, who lived on earth during the Golden Age, but was finally forced to depart to her home in heaven, banished by the injustice of men. Or it might be illustrated by the story of Aristides the Righteous, banished from Athens because the Athenians were tired of hearing him called righteous. But what is probably in the Evangelist's mind is the thought of a sad reversal of the glorious prospect depicted in the Psalms: 'Truth springeth out of the earth, and righteousness hath looked down from heaven'.³ How different was the prospect now! 'Truth', or 'the Spirit of Truth', is a title of the Paraclete,⁴ and instead of 'springing out of the earth' the Paraclete will come down to convict the earth! 'Righteousness', also, instead of 'looking down from heaven' to bless the inhabitants of earth, is on the point of being banished to heaven, as an exile from the unrighteous earth.

It is worth noting that this beautiful passage in the Psalms is narrowed in both the Talmuds by a technical interpretation.⁵ They

¹ John xiv. 16-20.

² John xvi. 8-10.

³ Ps. lxxxv. 11.

⁴ John xiv. 17, xv. 26, xvi. 13.

⁵ *Baba Bathra* 11 a, *Jer. Talm. Pea* i. 1. (Schwab, vol. ii, p. 7, inserts 'aumône' to make the meaning clear.)

take ‘righteousness’ as ‘acts of almsgiving’, stored up as treasures in heaven, whence they look down and bless the almsgiver. But the Hebrew poet conveys no such meaning, nor does the Targum thus narrow the words. The Fourth Gospel—whether alluding, or not, to the Psalm—certainly glorifies righteousness in its highest sense by this impressive use of the word in Christ’s Last Discourse. And the impression is deepened by the climax of ‘O righteous Father!’¹ in the very last sentence of the Last Prayer. It closes the record of Christ’s utterances—up to the moment of His arrest—with an exaltation of ‘Righteous Father’, even above ‘Holy Father’, as the highest appellation that God can receive from His own Son.

So much for the Johannine Gospel. But in the Johannine Epistle a different course is followed. In that short treatise righteousness is thrice mentioned, and always in the phrase ‘*do righteousness*’. This does not occur in the New Testament elsewhere except once in Revelation and once (as above quoted) in Matthew’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, ‘Take heed that ye *do not your righteousness* before men’.² There, as we have seen, the word meant ‘almsgiving’. Here the writer of the Epistle appears to be warning his readers not only against some who narrowed down righteousness to works of almsgiving, but also against others who denied the need of any righteous works at all. Against both, he contends that our ‘righteousness’ must be Christ’s and no other. Against the former he says, ‘Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him [i.e. God]’³ and ‘He that doeth righteousness is righteous as he [i.e. Christ] is righteous’.⁴ Against the latter—the despisers of all such righteousness as is manifested by ‘doing’, and the exalters of self-absorbed, solitary meditations on things divine—he says, ‘Every one that doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother’.⁵

These sentences contain the sum and substance of what we know from all the Gospels to have been Christ’s actual doctrine, namely, that all our righteousness must be based on our love of God as our Father and of men as our brethren. How He may have expressed it may be a matter of doubt. Several modern critics are of opinion that Matthew has interpolated a mention of righteousness whenever his mention of it is not supported by the parallel Luke. But as Luke never allows the word to pass Christ’s lips at all, but resorts to other ways of expressing Christ’s condemnation of those who ‘trusted in

¹ John xvii. 25 ‘Righteous Father!’ appears to come as a climax after xvii. 11 ‘Holy Father!’

² Matt. vi. 1, Rev. xxii. 11.

⁴ 1 John iii. 7.

³ 1 John ii. 29.

⁵ 1 John iii. 10.

themselves that they were righteous and despised others', such a sweeping condemnation of Matthew's consistent traditions is based on insecure foundations.

Our conclusions, then, are as follows. It may be taken as certain that Jesus, in *thought* at all events, protested against the 'doing' of a spurious 'righteousness' or 'almsgiving', dictated by the love of the applause of men as well as by a belief that it would be rewarded in strict accordance with a debtor and creditor account registered by God. It may be taken as highly probable that occasionally Jesus, when thus protesting, used the *word* 'righteousness' in the technical sense in which it was used by the Jews in, and before, the first century. It is more probable that Luke omitted all these traditions as being too technical—and as being capable of expression in other ways—than that Matthew, without any authority, interpolated all of them in Christ's doctrine. It is probable that the Johannine Epistle alludes to these differences between Matthew and Luke on the subject, and still more probable that the Epistle faithfully expresses Christ's fundamental doctrine about it.

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